



My Stars and Stripes Honor Flight

By Don Millar

This memorable day began on September 12, 2015 with an 0400 pick up as Julie Ihlenfeld and I needed to arrive at the Milwaukee Airport at 0530. After check-in and pictures, we were served a delightful breakfast, this was our 1st of 5 meals we received throughout the day!

At 0700, we departed the airport in heroic fashion. Our 747 was escorted by 2 WWII fighter planes and we were honored with a "cannon salute." The "cannon salute" consists of 2 fire engines spraying the plane while service men/women were outside saluting us as we departed for DC.

One hour and 27 minutes later we arrived to a wet Washington DC. The intermittent torrential rains and foreboding skies did NOT deter our enthusiasm. In the airport we were warmly welcomed by approximately 100 DC natives. Our Honor Flight group consisted of 184 veterans and our guardians, doctors, nurses and other attentive volunteers.

Our first stop was the WWII Memorial. Sitting outside this beautiful monument was Senator Bob Dole. He was the driving force in our Senate that pushed to pursue funding for this Memorial. Senator Dole was also a WWII veteran and is present to greet veterans at this memorial. I was fortunate to get pictures and his autograph.



At the Korean War Memorial we were able to meet

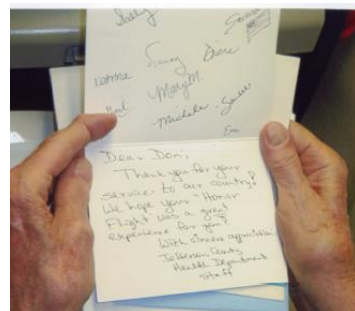
Vice Rear Admiral Dirk J. Debbink, an Oconomowoc WI native. I was blessed to receive the Vice Admiral's Naval Medallion that I will cherish forever. Imagine, a career navy man bestowing this medallion to a Marine!

From there we traveled to Arlington National Cemetery to watch the changing of the guard.

We ended our day at the Iwo Jima Memorial. There we took a group picture and had ample time to take additional photos.



On the flight home I was surprised that we had “mail call.” Imagine my astonishment with the thick envelope I received containing 72 cards and letters, many from my work family at Jefferson County. I want to profusely thank each of you, who took the time to write a letter or send a card. Your thoughtfulness and kind hearted words have touched me deeply.



We returned to Mitchell Airport at 2217 hours where additional surprises awaited me. As we exited the 747, bagpipes were playing and 225 servicemen/women were presenting arms and saluting us as we passed by. Then we were embraced by an enthusiastic crowd of 2500 well-wishers. Never before have I experienced such patriotism and warmth. At one curve in the parade route, a body appeared inside the secured area. Initially, I was uncertain of whom this culprit was, but as she moved her camera I was able to identify our very own Denise Grossman who was there to personally welcome us home!

In closing, I am reminded of a statement from Winston Churchill “Never in the field of human conflict was so much owed by so many, to so few”. This Stars and Stripes Honor Flight certainly went along way recognizing the service of this country’s veterans. I would implore any veteran to submit their applications for an Honor Flight. Then, they too can experience this incredible event.

